

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of accessing a computer file and application for manipulating the file comprising the steps of:
 - 5 creating an icon corresponding to a file including information, the icon substantially depicting at least a portion of the information from the file;
 - storing the icon in a memory;
 - displaying the icon; and
 - invoking the file and an application for manipulating the file upon
- 10 selection of the icon.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of creating an icon corresponding to a file including information comprises creating an icon substantially depicting a display of information from the file while the file is being manipulated by an application.
- 15 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of creating an icon corresponding to a file including information includes capturing a graphical representation of the file while an application is manipulating the file.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein capturing a graphical representation is initiated by a user input command while the application manipulating
- 20 the file is active.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the user input command is a keyboard command.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing information related to an application for manipulating the file in a memory along with
- 25 the icon.
7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of displaying the icon in a window on a screen display.
8. The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of displaying the window when a cursor is positioned at an edge of the screen display.
- 30 9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of concealing the window when the cursor is positioned outside of the window.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of invoking the file and an application for manipulating the file consists of invoking the file and the application upon a single user input command selecting the icon.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the single user input command
5 comprises depressing a button when a cursor is placed over the icon.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the button is a mouse button and the cursor is a mouse-driven cursor.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein if an application is active then the step of invoking the file and an application for manipulating the file comprises
10 accessing the active application.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing data related to files and corresponding applications each time the files and applications are opened and closed during a session, and wherein the step of invoking the file and an application for manipulating the file comprises invoking the file and the application
15 based on the stored data related to files and corresponding applications.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the data related to files and corresponding applications includes a document path, a document handle, an application path, and an application handle.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of invoking the file and
20 the application for manipulating the file further includes printing the file.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of invoking the file and the application for manipulating the file comprises copying the file to a designated storage device.

18. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of creating an icon
25 corresponding to a file including information comprises creating an icon corresponding to a template file.

19. A method of providing a user interface for accessing a file based on a corresponding icon comprising:

storing a plurality of icons in a memory along with a corresponding
30 plurality of references to an underlying file system for storage information for a plurality of files, each icon having an appearance substantially depicting information from its corresponding file;

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25. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of invoking the application further includes printing the file.

26. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of invoking the application comprises copying the file to a designated storage device.

27. A method of using icons to switch between a plurality of files and corresponding applications on a computer having a file system and an operating system user interface to the files within the file system, the icons being references to

the files separate from the operating system user interface to the files within the file system, the method comprising:

storing an icon for each of the plurality of files along with data related to an application for manipulating the file and data referencing a storage location of the file within the file system;

selecting an icon from the window; and

invoking the file and the application for manipulating the file corresponding to the selected icon based on the data related to the application and the data referencing the storage location of the file.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein the icon substantially depicts information from the file.

29. The method of claim 27, further comprising the steps of providing a window for displaying the icons and displaying the window based on a user-initiated display action.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the step of displaying the window comprises displaying the window based on movement of a cursor to a predefined screen location.

31. The method of claim 30, wherein movement of a cursor to a predefined screen location comprises movement of a cursor to an edge of a screen.

32. The method of claim 30, further comprising concealing the window based on movement of the cursor to a second predefined screen location.

33. The method of claim 27, wherein the step of selecting an icon from the window comprises placing a cursor over the icon and depressing a button.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein placing a cursor over an icon and depressing a button comprises placing a mouse-driven cursor over an icon and depressing a mouse button.

35. The method of claim 27, wherein if an application is active then the step of invoking the file and the application for manipulating the file comprises accessing the active application.

36. The method of claim 27, wherein the step of invoking the file and the application for manipulating the file further includes printing the file.

37. The method of claim 27, wherein the step of invoking the file and the application for manipulating the file comprises copying the file to a designated storage device.

38. The method of claim 27, wherein the applications include at least two of a word processor, a database program, a spreadsheet program, and a drawing program.

39. A method of providing a template file for access outside an application comprising:

storing a file to be manipulated by an application as a template file along with an icon corresponding to the file and data related to the application used to manipulate the template file;

marking the template file as read-only;

displaying the icon outside the application; and

invoking the template file and the application used to manipulate the template file when the icon is selected.

40. The method of claim 39, wherein the icon substantially depicts information from the file.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein the icon substantially depicts a display of the file while the file is being manipulated by an application.